



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Brussels, 22.6.2011
COM(2011) 354 final

**REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND
THE COUNCIL**

**on Member States' efforts during 2009 to achieve a sustainable balance between fishing
capacity and fishing opportunities**

{SEC(2011) 759 final}
{SEC(2011) 760 final}

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	Introduction	3
2.	Summary of Member State's reports	3
3.	Fishing capacity trends during 2009	7
3.1.	Results for the mainland fleet, i.e. excluding vessels registered in the outermost regions	8
3.2.	Results for the fleets registered in the outermost regions	8
4.	Compliance with fishing capacity management rules.....	8
5.	Quality of Member States' reports	8
6.	The Commission's conclusions	12

REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL

on Member States' efforts during 2009 to achieve a sustainable balance between fishing capacity and fishing opportunities

1. INTRODUCTION

Member States are required to submit to the Commission, before 1 May each year, a report on their efforts during the previous year to achieve a sustainable balance between fleet capacity and available fishing opportunities¹. On the basis of these reports and the data in the EU fishing fleet register, the Commission produced a summary for 2009, and presented it to the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) and to the Committee for Fisheries and Aquaculture. This report from the Commission now presents that summary of the Member States' reports, plus a technical annex (Commission Staff Working Document no. SEC(2011) 759) and the opinions of the above-mentioned committees (Commission Staff Working Document no. SEC(2011) 760) to the Council and the European Parliament.

2. SUMMARY OF MEMBER STATE'S REPORTS

This year, ten Member States submitted their reports on time, while the other reports were between one and twelve weeks late. Despite these delays, the Commission presented the summary report to the above-mentioned committees by 31 July 2010. It should be added that, although most Member States followed the outline laid down for the report in Article 13 of Regulation 1438/2003, the quality of the information provided was not always sufficient for the purposes of this report.

This report sums up Member States' descriptions of their fishing fleets, the impact of the existing schemes to reduce fishing effort and Member States' compliance with the entry/exit scheme.

Belgium: The guidelines were applied in the report to the beam trawler segment catching predominantly plaice and sole. The average value of the biological indicator for both plaice and sole were below one, but this was not the case for every stock separately. Seven vessels (above 221 kW) fishing with beam trawls were scrapped and two vessels were partially decommissioned. The 24-40m beam trawl fleet segment had a high quota utilisation for plaice and sole in all areas, except in area VIIa. According to the report, the low capacity utilisation in this area was mainly due to increased national quota due to the exchanges. A future reduction of the fleet capacity by decommissioning is not planned.

Bulgaria: There are 2 100 fishing vessels less than 12 m representing approximately 95% of all Bulgarian vessels. Out of a total of 2 206 vessels, 1.304 vessels were reported as inactive in 2009. Five vessels entered the fleet based on an administrative decision taken before accession. A total of 366 vessels were excluded from the fleet register in 2009 without public

¹ In accordance with Article 14 of Regulation 2371/2002 and Article 12 of Regulation 1438/2003

aid, of which 344 vessels as a result of a national administrative measure regarding inactive vessels. The guidelines were applied in the Bulgarian report. The technical indicator shows low capacity utilisation for all fleet segments, but three of the segments used more days at sea than last year. Vessels under 12 m in length have the most negative assessment. Bulgaria intends to develop more restrictive legislation measures with regard to the inactive vessels. Bulgaria applies a quota regime for only the two main species: turbot and sprat.

Denmark: The guidelines were applied in the report for 11 fleet segments categorised in accordance with the Data Collection Regulation. The analysis shows that the present situation is rather stable and indicates that there is no significant long term overcapacity. However, when passive vessels are included there is overcapacity in segments of small vessels. Difficult economic conditions may mean that economic indicators will show an increase of overcapacity in economic terms. The main reduction in capacity was seen in the segment of vessels between 12 and 24m. Capacity from scrapped vessels amounted to 4 684 GT in 2009, which was 6% of the total capacity. The existing possibility to transfer quota has resulted in a decrease of the number of commercial vessels in Denmark. A weakness in the management system is the difficulty to verify whether the engine power is stated correctly.

Germany: The guidelines were not applied in the report. The report assessed the capacity trend in each fleet segment versus the trend of the main stocks concerned. Fifty five vessels were withdrawn from the German fishing fleet (-3%); total tonnage was reduced by 552 GT (0.8%) and engine power increased by 1 026 kW (0.64%). According to the report, fishing effort reduction schemes had a limited impact on the reduction of the fleet, which was not quantified. The State did not take action on the development of the fleet because it has adapted both to the economic conditions established by the CFP, and to the restricted availability of resources.

Estonia: In the report the guidelines were applied in part. The technical indicator shows distinct overcapacity within the segment of trawler vessels over 12m. Eleven vessels have been withdrawn from the Fishing Vessel Register with public aid in 2009. Since 2004 the fishing capacity of the Estonian fishing fleet has decreased by 40%. The report states that the current capacity of the Estonian fleet is below the minimum fishing capacity necessary to catch its quota. No assessment of the effect of the recovery measures adopted for Baltic cod was provided.

Greece: The report did not include the calculation of indicators proposed in the guidelines. It was not possible to provide socio-economic and biological indicators in the report because the National Fisheries Data Collection Programme was not carried out. However, from data on catches and fishing effort collected under other programmes, the report concludes that fishing activities and the situation of biological stocks (despite small variations in the biomass caused by the biological cycle) were unchanged from the previous year. Public aid continued to finance a reduction in capacity during 2009, resulting in the decommissioning of 23 vessels with a capacity of 523 GT and 1.873 KW.

Spain: The guidelines were not applied and no assessment of fleet capacity in relation to fishing opportunities was provided. The reduction in fleet capacity continued as in previous years; 66 vessels with a total tonnage of 4 949 GT were decommissioned with public aid; some of the exits took place by an administrative decision due to lack of fishing activity. 85 new vessels entered the fleet with a total tonnage slightly over 1 000 GT. The Spanish fleet is subject to the recovery plan for Southern hake and nephrops and also to several national

plans. However, no information is provided concerning the effect of the fishing effort limitations included in these plans on the capacity of the fleets.

France: The report gave an extended description of the fleet and its resource base, but the guidelines were not applied. No assessment of the balance between the size of the fleet and fishing opportunities was provided. In this respect, the report states that the management measures in place have resulted in the reduction of fleet capacity and a gradual adjustment of the fleet to fishing opportunities. According to the report, five decommissioning schemes were under implementation during 2009; these schemes have resulted in the exit of 110 vessels from the fleet with a total tonnage of approximately 8 200 GT. Significant effort reductions are reported under the cod recovery plan and for deep sea species.

Ireland: The guidelines were not applied and no assessment of the balance between fleet capacity and fishing opportunities was included. However, it is reported that many of the targeted stocks are outside safe biological limits. Fisheries falling within the scope of stock recovery plans (ICES areas VIa and VIIa) are of a highly mixed nature. As a result, the Irish administration has found it difficult to gauge the impact of effort reduction schemes. An increase of 11 GT was granted in 2009 as "safety tonnage".

Italy: The guidelines were applied in the report. However, the biological indicators were not calculated since no TACs are defined for the Mediterranean stocks, except bluefin tuna. Catch per unit of effort over the period 2004-2008 followed a declining trend for small scale vessels and seiners, while it was constant for long-liners and trawlers. Economic indicators pictured a worsening trend for almost all segments. Nevertheless, the report states that the negative values shown by the indicators in 2008 cannot be associated with an imbalance between the fleet and its fishing opportunities, but rather are the result of very high fuel prices. During 2009, the capacity of the Italian fleet was reduced by approximately 1% in terms of both tonnage and power.

Cyprus: The report provides a calculation and interpretation of indicators, but no assessment of the balance between capacity and fishing opportunities. The two biological indicators cannot be calculated because there are no quota shares or established harvest ratio targets for the stocks exploited (except for Bluefin tuna). There was a significant reduction in the income of the passive polyvalent gears in length category 12-24 m due to a dramatic decrease in the production of Albacore, the most important commercial species of this fleet category. The effect can also be seen in the reduced CPUE value for Albacore, caught by drifting longliners. During 2009 twelve fishing vessels were withdrawn from the fleet with public aid, and nineteen vessels without public aid.

Latvia: In 2009 the fishing fleet decreased with 47 vessels to a total of 794 vessels. At the same time the total capacity increased, due to administrative decisions taken before the accession (coups parties). Since 2004 a total of 160 vessels have been scrapped with financial support. The guidelines were applied in the Latvian report. The capacity utilization is quite low. Based on the set of biological indicators, Latvia concludes that its fisheries are close to achieving a balance between fishing capacity and fishing opportunities. The economic indicator CR/BER and the social indicators show a positive trend in economic effectiveness of the fishing fleet. The main reason is the reduced number of fishing vessels. There are plans to decommission 70 vessels in the Baltic segment and 110 vessels in the small-scale segment.

Lithuania: The guidelines were applied for the segments exploiting Eastern Baltic cod stocks. The analysis shows that the Baltic fishing fleet targeting Eastern Baltic cod is in balance with

the current stock size. The fishing capacity of the fleet fishing on pelagic stocks and salmon is in balance with fishing opportunities as well. A balance between the fishing effort and fishing opportunities is to be achieved by implementing the Lithuanian Fisheries Strategy. The objective is to reduce the small scale coastal fishing fleet by 50% until 2013, which makes up for 12% of the coastal fishing capacity. In 2009 seventeen small scale vessels and one vessel fishing in the high seas were withdrawn from the fleet with public aid. The economic results of the demersal trawlers 24-40 m segment improved significantly in 2009, as a result of the decrease of the number of vessels.

Malta: The guidelines were applied in the report. The technical indicator shows low utilisation of the fleet, with a decreasing trend for active gears (trawlers) and a relatively stable one for passive gears. According to the report, this indicator shows that less than half of the Maltese current fleet is not being used. The report concludes that the status of the resources exploited by the Maltese fishing fleet is such that a reduction in fishing capacity is not required. No fishing effort adjustment scheme was applied to the Maltese fleet. During 2009, 4 fishing vessels stopped their fishing activities through the adjustment of fishing effort aid scheme.

The Netherlands: In 2009 both the capacity and the fishing effort of the fishing fleet decreased slightly. The guidelines were applied to the beam trawl segment and to the pelagic freezer trawler segment. The fishing mortality of plaice and sole stocks has fallen substantially, but still needs to be reduced. Economic and social indicators deteriorated, due to low prices for the fish (plaice and sole) and high fuel prices. The Netherlands have curbed the capacity of fixed net fishing in 2009, which has been growing steadily for some years now. The report considers that high fuel prices have a strong impact on the economic vitality of the fishing fleet and that improving of the fuel efficiency is essential for the Dutch fishing fleet.

Poland: The guidelines were applied in the report, but it was limited to the biological indicator. No assessment of fleet capacity in relation to fishing opportunities was included. In 2009, 46 vessels were withdrawn from the Baltic fleet with public support. According to the report, as a result of the fishing effort reductions, the number of fishing days by the Baltic fleet in 2008 was 41.57% down on the level in 2004. Between 2004 and 2008 the number of fishing days for cod fell by as much as 38%. The reduction in the number of special cod permits in 2009 was achieved by excluding 2/3 of the Baltic fleet from cod fishing. Only 147 vessels received special cod permits.

Portugal: The guidelines were applied in the report, but no assessment of fishing fleet capacity in relation to fishing opportunities was included. 24 vessels were scrapped with public aid in various fleet segments, of which 21 as a result of the Southern hake or nephrops recovery plans. 34 vessels built with state aid joined the Azores fleet in 2009. The aggregated activity of the vessels covered by these plans increased in relation to 2008, although only 85% of the number of days allocated to them was used. Following the adjustment plan for vessels licensed to use dredges to fish clams in the South region adopted in 2008, 2 applications for decommissioning were approved in 2009. Vessels operating in NAFO area are covered by the Greenland halibut recovery plan. The total number of fishing days increased in relation to 2008, although it was still 31% lower than in 2003.

Romania: The guidelines were not applied in the report, although it claims that the fleet is operating in a sustainable manner and that the fish species are available in sufficient quantities. Overall, the fleet is old and in poor technical condition. Of the 443 vessels in the fleet register 160 vessels were active in 2009. There are plans for scrapping in the 2007-2013 EFF programming period. There were eleven new entries to the fleet in 2009 based on an

administrative decision taken before accession, and six vessels were withdrawn from the fleet without public aid. Romania wishes to maintain a minimum level of its fishing fleet ("minimum vitalis"), estimated at 12-13 modern and performing fishing vessels.

Slovenia: Slovenia partly applied the guidelines. The technical indicator shows low utilisation (< 0.7). The biological indicator could not be calculated. Due to investor mistrust, there's hardly any investment in Slovenian fisheries. In 2009, four vessels entered the segment of vessels under 12m. The fleet suffers from structural problems, in particular old vessels and obsolete gear. Scrapping is foreseen for the 2007-2013 EFF programming period. Slovenia has implemented its first management plan in the history of the Slovenian maritime fisheries. Since 2008 a measure has been implemented concerning the reduction of the number of trawl nets.

Finland: The guidelines were not applied in the report, although it concludes that as a whole, the Finnish fleet can be considered to be in an acceptable balance with the fishing resources. None of the quota was totally exhausted during 2009. A new capacity reduction scheme was implemented in 2009. This scheme was directed solely to the passive gear vessels, as the off-shore salmon fisheries suffer from poor profitability as a consequence of the driftnet ban in force since 2008. As a result of the scrapping scheme of 2009, a total capacity of 245 GT and 1698 kW was withdrawn from the fleet with public aid. Despite a reduction in capacity in relation to 2003, the total fishing effort of the Finnish fleet has shown an upward trend since 2005 and only stabilized in 2008 and 2009.

Sweden: The guidelines were applied in the report. Both the biological and the technical indicators show overcapacity in several segments. Within the EFF 2007–2013 framework, Sweden's operational programme has given priority to scrapping aid, and scrapping campaigns have been carried out in the Baltic Sea and North Sea. Annual quotas were introduced in the pelagic segment from 2007, which has led to structural change and some reduction in capacity. During the year, transferable fishing rights have also been introduced in pelagic fishing. The indicators reveal overcapacity in the fleet. The gross value added (GVA) shows that fishing contributes to the Swedish economy in all segments.

United Kingdom: The guidelines were not applied, although some other technical, biological and socio-economic data were provided. All fleet segments, with the exception of those using pots and traps, reduced their capacity over the period 2000-2009. The report concludes that the capacity of the UK fleet as a whole exceeds its level of opportunities. In 2009 the inactive fleet totalled 23 000 GT (11% of the total registered fleet) and 140 000 kW (17% of the total registered fleet). Problems in the English inshore fleet (under 10 metre) were due to an imbalance between the capacity of this fleet and the available quota. A total of 65 vessels under 10 metres were removed from the fleet in 2009 and a system of license capping was introduced.

3. FISHING CAPACITY TRENDS DURING 2009

According to the EU fishing fleet register, on 31 December 2009 the EU fishing fleet was made of 84 301 vessels with a total fishing capacity of 1 797 183 GT and 6 606 556 kW. During 2009, the number of vessels decreased by 1.53%, while tonnage and power decreased by 2.84% and 2.24% respectively. These figures include the vessels registered in the outermost regions.

During the seven period from 2003 to 2009, approximately 305 212 GT and 969 597 kW were withdrawn from the EU fleet (including the outermost regions) with public aid, of which 39 273 GT and 117 236 kW were withdrawn in 2009.

3.1. Results for the mainland fleet, i.e. excluding vessels registered in the outermost regions

The fleet subject to the entry-exit regime, i.e. excluding vessels registered in the outermost regions and those used exclusively for aquaculture, reduced its capacity during 2009 by approximately 2.80% and 2.55% in terms of tonnage and power respectively. Despite the 2004 and 2007 enlargements, the EU fishing fleet is smaller now than it was on 1 January 2003.

During the period seven year period 2003-2009, the capacity of the 'EU-15 fleet' was reduced by approximately 16% both in terms of tonnage and power. The 'EU-10 fleet' was reduced by 31% in tonnage and 27% in power.. Romania and Bulgaria have withdrawn around 7% of capacity in terms kW.

3.2. Results for the fleets registered in the outermost regions

The trend in the capacity of the fleets registered in the outermost regions is summarised in table 4 in the technical annex. The capacity of the fleet registered in the Canary Islands has been reduced in terms of both tonnage and power. In the French Overseas Departments, the tonnage of the fleet was reduced but its power increased due mainly to the regularisation of engine power, following an increase in the reference levels. In Azores and Madeira, following the implementation of a fleet development plan, the power of the fleet increased, although its tonnage continued to decline. In all cases the reference levels for the various fleet segments were complied with.

4. COMPLIANCE WITH FISHING CAPACITY MANAGEMENT RULES

All Member States have complied with these rules, including the specific limitations for the fleets registered in the outermost regions. On average, the fishing capacity of the EU fleet is roughly 9% below the fishing capacity ceilings that result from the management rules. Tables 1 and 2 in the technical annex to this report summarise the compliance by Member States with the entry/exit scheme and the reference levels on 31 December 2009.

5. QUALITY OF MEMBER STATES' REPORTS

In their national reports, 14 Member States made to some extent use of the guidelines for the assessment of the balance between fishing capacity and fishing opportunities. The technical difficulties related to its applicability, non availability of data and lack of coordination, in particular with scientific bodies in the Member States continue to hinder their application. When the guidelines are used, Member States do not always draw concrete conclusions from the results of their application. However, in a number of cases the values obtained for the balance indicators point to an excess of fishing capacity.

Most of the reports do not establish a relation between effort reductions schemes and fleet capacity adjustments. It should be born in mind that there are no effort adjustment schemes in some fisheries or fishing areas, e.g. the Mediterranean. Where there is effort adjustment, often

there is no clear information concerning the trend in the effort deployed in particular fisheries or by the fleet as a whole. Overall it appears that the impact of fishing effort adjustment measures on fleet capacity is limited, but in some fleets their consequences are revealed by the low activity level.

The assessment of STECF was summarised as follows:

- Overall there is variation in the completeness and quality of MS reports for 2009 but there is a general improvement in completeness compared to the reports for 2008. Once again a common strength amongst the Member States' reports was the description provided of their fleets, changes of the fleet over the year and linkages with fisheries. Key points to note are:
- There has been a distinct overall improvement in providing the required elements of the MS reports compared to the 2008 reports.
- Several MS mentioned as not having completed required elements in their 2008 reports have included those elements in their 2009 reports.
- Sweden, Spain and UK did not describe their fishing fleets in relation to fisheries.
- All MS stated whether they complied with entry/exit schemes.
- Five MS (Belgium, Cyprus, Estonia, Greece and Spain) did not provide a summary of weaknesses & strengths of fleet management system.
- Eleven Member States' reports did not provide plans for improvements in fleet management systems.
- Seven Member States did not give information on the level of compliance with fleet policy instruments. This was an improvement on 2008 MS reports.
- Eight MS did not give an overall opinion on whether their fleet was or was not in balance with its fishing opportunity in 2009 (compared to 14 in 2008 reports).
- Greece was the most improved MS in terms of score achieved.

STCEF also prepared a scoreboard on the quality and content of the MS reports that is reproduced below.

Scores by Member State for inclusion of required elements in annual reports²

Q	Required element of report	Max scores	BE	BG	CY	DK	EE	FI	DE	EL	EI	IT	LV	LT	MT	NL	PL	PT	RO	SI	ES	SE	UK
1A	i) Description of fleets	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
	ii) Link with fisheries	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	0	0	0
	iii) Development in fleets	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	0	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	0	3	3
1B	i) statement of effort reduction schemes	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	0	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
	ii) impact on fishing capacity of effort reduction schemes	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	0	3	3
1C	Statement of compliance with entry / exit scheme and with level of reference	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
1D	i) Summary of weaknesses & strengths of fleet management system	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1
	ii) plan for improvements in fleet management system	2	0	2	2	2	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	2	0	2	2
	iii) information on general level of compliance with fleet policy instruments	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
1E	Information on changes of the administrative procedures relevant to fleet management	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
2	Report 10 pages or less?	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	0
O	Overall: does report assess balance between capacity & opportunity?	3	3	3	0	3	3	0	3	3	0	3	3	3	3	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	3
Total scores:		24	19	24	18	23	19	19	19	23	14	23	22	20	21	22	24	20	19	20	8	18	20

²

The French report was not submitted in time to be assessed by the STECF working group

Scores by Member State for quality of required elements in annual report

Q	Required element of report	Max scores	BE	BG	CY	DK	EE	FI	DE	EL	EI	IT	LV	LT	MT	NL	PL	PT	RO	SI	ES	SE	UK
1A	i) Description of fleets	3	3	3	3	3	2.5	3	3	3	3	1.5	3	2	2	3	1.5	2	3	3	3	3	3
	ii) Link with fisheries	3	1	2	3	2	2.5	3	3	2.5	2	3	3	2	2.5	2	1.5	2.5	3	0.5	0	0	0
	iii) Development in fleets	3	2	2.5	0.5	3	2.5	3	3	1	0	1	3	1.5	2	2	1.5	2	3	2	0	3	3
1B	i) statement of effort reduction schemes	3	2.5	0.5	3	3	3	3	0	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	2.5	3	3	3	3
	ii) impact on fishing capacity of effort reduction schemes	3	2	2	3	3	3	2.5	1	3	1.5	3	1.5	3	3	2	3	3	3	0.5	0	1.5	3
1C	Statement of compliance with entry / exit scheme and with level of reference	3	1.5	3	3	3	3	2.5	3	3	3	3	2.5	1.5	3	0	2.5	3	3	3	2	0	3
1D	i) Summary of weaknesses & strengths of fleet management system	3	0	1.5	0	3	0	1.5	2	0	0	1.5	3	2.5	1.5	3	3	1.5	3	3	0	1.5	0
	ii) plan for improvements in fleet management system	3	0	1.5	2	2	0	0	0	1.5	0	2.5	0	0	0	0	3	2.5	0	3	0	1.5	3
	iii) information on general level of compliance with fleet policy instruments	3	0	0.5	0	0	0	1.5	0	0.5	0	0.5	0	0	2	1	3	2.5	1	2	1.5	1.5	0
1E	Information on changes of the administrative procedures relevant to fleet management	3	0	1.5	3	3	0	2.5	3	2.5	0	1	3	0	1.5	3	3	1.5	2	2	0	1.5	3
2	Report 10 pages or less?	n/a																					
O	Overall: does report assess balance between capacity & opportunity?	3	2	2	0	3	2	0	2	1.5	0	1.5	1.5	2	0	1.5	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Total scores:		33	14.0	20.0	20.5	28.0	18.5	22.5	20.0	21.5	12.5	21.5	23.5	17.5	20.5	20.5	25.0	23.5	23.5	22.0	9.5	16.5	24.0

6. THE COMMISSION'S CONCLUSIONS

During 2009, the overall reduction in fleet capacity continued to be between 2% and 3% on average, as it was during previous years. The overall trend in fishing capacity since 1992, shown in figures 3 to 5 in the technical annex, shows no appreciable change in the tendency.

The Commission is concerned that the total power of the fleet as recorded in the EU and Member States Fleet Registers may not reflect the power effectively deployed at sea, an issue that will be addressed by way of application of the new Control Regulation and its implementing rules.

The economic data for 2009 was not available for the majority of the Member States in which case, the reports include data for 2008. The Annual Economic Report³ shows a deterioration of the economic performance in 2008. It is reasonable to conclude that, the economic performance of the fleet in 2009 was influenced by the high fuel prices in 2008 and the subsequent economic crises. Furthermore, it can be seen from the reports of MS that fishing activity, i.e. the average number of fishing days per vessel is rather low and often, when times series are available, shows a declining trend.

The amount of capacity decommissioned with public aid in 2009 increased approximately 10% in relation to 2008. Capacity reductions with public funds accounted for 73% in GT and 79% in kW of the net capacity reduction during 2009. This seems to indicate that economic problems and the scarcity of fishing opportunities due to overexploitation of resources are pushing down the size of the fleet. For many Member States, the size of their fleet is well under the capacity ceilings which result from the entry-exit regime, as mentioned above. Moreover, decommissioning programmes, being always a voluntary option for vessel owners, are driven by poor economic results and not necessarily by the state of the stocks. These considerations call for a reflection on the role of fishing capacity limitations and put into question the need and effectiveness of publicly financed capacity reductions.

The implementation of individual transferable rights (ITR) in some fisheries has resulted in capacity reductions without public aid. The extension of ITR schemes to more fisheries, especially those with a greater excess of fishing capacity could facilitate its adjustment.

Despite the fact that some specific fleets seem to be reasonably in balance with its fishing opportunities, the overall assessment indicates an excess of fishing capacity. This can be concluded from the combination of overfishing, i.e. excessive fishing mortality in some stocks which calls for fishing effort reductions, low capacity utilisation, i.e. a very low average number of fishing days per vessel and low profitability. The current rate of capacity reductions, which are at least partly compensated by technological progress, will make it difficult to eliminate overcapacity in the short term if no changes are made to the current policy.

The opportunity to implement the policy changes required to eliminate excess of fleet capacity in the coming reform of the common fisheries policy should not be missed.

³ 2010 Annual Economic Report on the European Fishing Fleet, ISBN 978-92-79-17117-8